EVALUATION CRITERIA

30-A MRSA §4331(1) directs SPO to establish criteria based on the statutory goals of the Act that are objective, verifiable, and, to the extent practicable, quantifiable and to establish baselines against which to evaluate progress. It further directs the Office to evaluate the Program generally at the regional and statewide level and to compare land use development trends at the local level, especially comparing towns that have participated in the Program to towns that have not.

SPO's first priority in evaluating the effectiveness of achieving the goals of the Act is to determine what has actually changed –to focus on the *outcomes* of state, regional, and local actions.

An outcome is the actual result of our efforts – the impact on the health of our environment or on the human condition. Outcomes can also be distinguished between long-term outcomes and intermediate outcomes. Long-term outcomes are most often associated with broad goals while intermediate outcomes measure incremental progress toward the goals. The day-to-day activities that help us accomplish our outcomes can also be measured in terms of outputs. Outputs are quantifiable and reflect the level of service we provide or products we produce.

Simply put, a group of people can drive to Bangor for dinner and a movie. Our effort to drive there is our activity. Measures of that activity are our outputs and might include the amount of time to get there, gallons of gas consumed, or cost per mile driven. Arriving in Bangor is our intermediate outcome. The true outcome is having an enjoyable evening with our friends.

In terms of Smart Growth, the progression might look like this:

Activities:

- Working with state agencies to change policies and programs that promote sprawl
- Providing grants and technical assistance to municipalities

Outputs:

- Number of state policies changed to remove hidden subsidies of sprawl
- Number of towns with consistent comprehensive plans and consistent ordinances

Intermediate Outcomes

- Improved efficiencies in use of state dollars
- Changes in the location of where growth occurs (less sprawl)
- Population shifting back to service centers (less sprawl)

Long-term Outcomes

- Preservation of natural resources
- Economic vitality of communities

Indicators are also useful when dealing with complex issues. Indicators do not measure outcomes directly, but provide information from which we can reasonably draw conclusions about our outcomes. Indicators are a way to assess long-term issues (environmental protection, human health, economic conditions); to demonstrate outcomes that are comprised of many and diverse factors (community vitality); or as a surrogate for outcomes that are difficult or costly to measure (such as success of fire prevention or impacts on dispersed populations like the homeless). Indicators are not perfect measures, but they can give us an understanding of circumstances in the absence of measuring the actual outcome. For example, the amount of tip left for the waitperson in the restaurant in Bangor is an indicator of the difficult-to-measure enjoyment of a dinner out.

For this evaluation, SPO relies on a combination of intermediate outcomes, indicators, and outputs.

Outcomes

SPO has selected three intermediate outcome measures to be used in the evaluation of the program effectiveness.

1. Percent of service center communities whose population growth is at or above the statewide rate
2. Percent of new development that occurs in locally-designated growth areas
3. Percent of state capital investment that is directed to locally-designated growth areas

1. Population Shift

Maine has 76 service centers. Service center communities are areas where people congregate to work, to play, to shop, or to receive services. The Legislature established four basic criteria to identify the municipalities in Maine that serve as centers:

- Jobs to workers ratio
- Volume of jobs
- Level of retail sales
- Amount of federally-assisted housing

Consideration is also given to the geographic distribution of municipalities. In addition to large urban places that serve as primary centers like Lewiston, Bangor, and Augusta, communities that serve as small (local) centers and include rural service hubs like Dexter, Jackman, and Eastport, as well as specialized centers like Millinocket, Fort Kent, Greenville, and Fairfield are also considered service centers.

Population growth (or lack thereof) is an indicator of the health of Maine's service centers and the extent of sprawl. This measure tracks the rate of population change in service center communities compared to the overall statewide rate of population change.

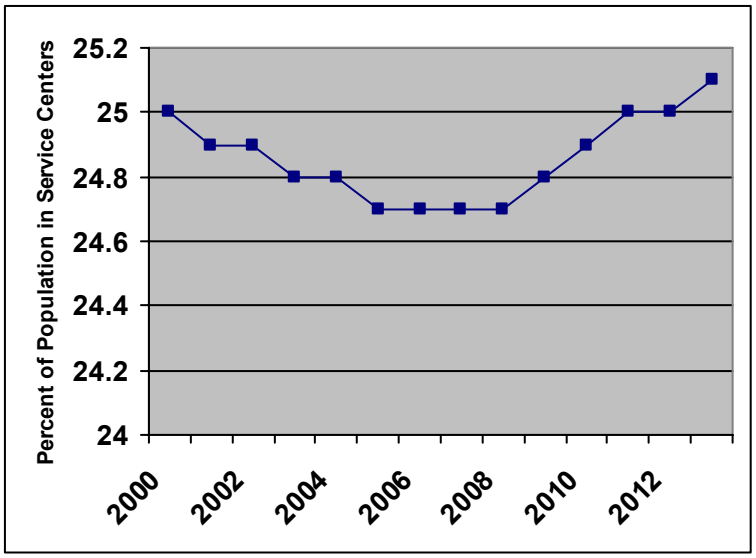

Figure 1: Population in Service Centers as a Percentage of Total Population – 2000 Baseline and Projected Trend

Since 1960, population has been moving out of service center communities, sapping the vitality of traditional downtowns and forcing the construction of new, costly infrastructure in rural areas.

From 1990-2000, Maine's overall population grew by 3.7%. Yet, only 25% of the service center towns had population growth rates at or above the statewide rate over this same period. This means service center populations are growing slower than other communities (many are losing population).

Yet, in some areas of the State, in southern and coastal Maine, for example, some communities have population growth rates as high as 20-30% over the 10 years. With a statewide growth rate of barely 4%, these high growth rates cannot be the result of new population. We can conclude therefore that population is shifting. Our analysis shows it is shifting away from service center communities to rapidly suburbanizing and rural areas.

In the immediate future (2000-2005), SPO expects the population of service center hubs to continue to decline. In the near term, changes in state policies and local and regional land use decisions will not affect the status quo. Nevertheless, they will impact new development in the future. Beyond 2005, we hope that state and local efforts to curb sprawl will have the effect of slowing or stabilizing declining populations in service centers. As efforts continue, we hope that the rate of decline will reverse into the next decade.

2. Development Patterns

SPO intends to track where new development occurs to determine the effectiveness of local plans and ordinances and of state actions. Through the comprehensive planning process, municipalities identify the areas within their bounds best suited for growth (either due to the availability of infrastructure, access to services, or apart from natural resource and other areas that the town desires to protect). These areas are known as locally-designated growth areas. Implementation of

comprehensive plans through ordinances and permitting would steer new development to those areas the town has identified as where they want growth to occur. Implementation of state policies that give preference to locally-designated growth areas will do the same.

SPO's intent is to determine whether or not new development is actually located in those areas (and conversely whether it is *not* located in protected areas).

SPO and the Maine Office of Geographic Information Systems are currently developing a methodology to track development. The method being tested would identify new development based on the assignment of E911 addresses using geographic information system (GIS) technology. Municipalities will assign a GIS code to new addresses based on general categories of use for a structure (residential, commercial, public/civic, or specialized). This method will allow us to identify the construction of new principal structures warranting an address, regardless of whether a community has a building permit system or not. Addresses for new development can then be mapped and overlaid onto a map of local growth areas. New development can thus be readily tracked as in or out of designated growth areas.

Status of Mapping

Since it was recommended in 1999, SPO has worked to establish and fund a reliable system to track the location of development. A breakthrough occurred in 2002 when the Legislature codified a plan to create the Maine Geo-Library (a statewide geographic information system) and voters approved a $2.3 million bond for its implementation. Concurrent with this larger project, SPO and the Maine Office of GIS developed and have begun piloting the methodology for tracking the location of new growth. As of year-end 2002, the software application was ready for beta testing. A steering committee to guide the pilot convened in January 2003. While participation in the tracking system will be voluntary, municipalities receiving community planning grants since 2001 have agreed to participate in the development tracking system to monitor the success of their local growth management programs. The E911 address data layer and the completion of the municipal growth area maps will enable evaluation of the efficacy of local growth management programs.

The launching of the development tracking system still depends on creation of the standards and framework of the Maine Geo-Library, which will be established during 2003, and for which bond funds will be used to match federal dollars for initial capital costs (largely a joint purchase of aerial photography with federal agencies).

3. State Capital Investment

State investments in capital projects such as roads and other transportation facilities, schools, sewer and water systems, transfer stations, fire stations, hospitals, and economic development infrastructure drive local development. Not only that, but we know that considerable state investment is spent, not to serve growing populations, but to accommodate shifting populations, often resulting in redundant capacity in schools, roads, or other infrastructure built with state funds. In 2000, the Legislature, recognizing the impact of state investments on local growth and intending to improve the efficiency with which state resources are used, directed state agencies

to give preference to projects that are in designated growth areas when providing funding, grants, or loans (30-A MRSA §4349-A).

This measure would track the location of state capital investments, again, using GIS technology. As they occur, the State would code investments and their location. It is intended that the State's accounting system would be used within a GIS module. Similar to the location of new development, a map of the location of state capital investments could be overlaid on GIS maps of locally-designated growth areas to determine whether state goals for investment are being met. SPO will work with the Department of Administrative and Financial Services and stakeholder agencies to test the feasibility of this approach.

Level of Analysis

As part of the Office's evaluation, the Legislature asked for an illustration of the impact of the Program by comparing land use development trends and patterns in a sample of municipalities that have participated in the Program with a sample of municipalities that have not.

As part of the 1999 evaluation, SPO collected data by hand for a sample of municipalities to attempt to compare 1990s development patterns in places where growth management policies had been instituted. Though the data demonstrated that little difference was discernible between municipalities that had and had not instituted growth planning measures (setting SPO on a course to stimulate "emboldening" of comprehensive plans), it also became extremely clear that a uniform, automated system needed to be created to perform such analysis in the future.

For this evaluation, SPO looked at the population growth rates of a sample of municipalities that have consistent comprehensive plans and consistent ordinances to see if there was a difference when compared to those municipalities that do not have an active growth management program. We compared two samples of 12 service center communities. There was no significant difference in population growth rates between the two sets of sample municipalities.

These are simple and unscientific comparisons and do not adequately make the kind of comparison desired. We need better data to achieve the evaluation requirements of the Act. The outcome measures that SPO identified above will meet this need when data become available.

Indicators of Livable Communities

In addition, SPO incorporates by reference the report of the Land and Water Resources Council, *Indicators of Livable Communities: A report on Smart Growth and the impact of land use decisions on Maine's communities, environment, and countryside* (see APPENDIX E for a full copy of the report).

According to the *Livable Communities* report, "We use indicators to understand the progress we are making – or failing to make – toward [Smart Growth]…The [livable communities] indicators … allow us to make a statement about how well we are encouraging land-development patterns that stimulate vitality in our communities, support productive countrysides and natural resource-

based industries, and protect Maine's environment. They do not tell the whole story, but do condense a large amount of information into a manageable narrative. By monitoring…[these indicators], we can understand how well policies, programs, and individual decisions stimulate development…that sustain and restore our resources, communities, and land…This can allow us to understand if the decisions being made are good ones or if they need to be reassessed."[15]

The livable communities' indicators serve the purpose of helping to evaluate progress toward the 10 statutory goals of the Act (see APPENDIX F for a breakdown of the 22 indicators by goal).

So what is Smart Growth?

According to the indicators of livable communities, smart growth…

…is communities planning for growth;
…is the opportunity to live in vibrant service center communities;
…is building new homes in service center communities;
…is being able to walk to local services, places, and events;
…is having outdoor recreational opportunities within your community;
…results in vital downtown business districts and village centers;
…results in economically vital service center communities;
…is maintaining and improving the infrastructure of Maine's service center communities;
…is making service center communities attractive places to live;
…results in efficient use of roads and highways;
…provides alternative modes of transport for freight and cargo;
…provides citizens with choices for travel;
…results in cleaner air;
…results in clean and healthy lakes;
…protects groundwater quality;
…results in clean and healthy rivers;
…results in clean and healthy clam flats and ocean waters;
…protects important natural places and resources;
…results in species abundance and biological diversity;
…enhances the viability of Maine's working forests;
…maintains commercial access to marine resources;
…slows the loss of productive farmland; and
…maintains timberland that supports a vital forest and paper industry.

Areas where we are doing well[16]

- The number of municipalities with adopted consistent comprehensive plans (219 in 2002)
- The percent of people purchasing basic household goods in their downtown or local village (70% in 2002)

[15] *Indicators of Livable Communities.* p-ii-iii.
[16] Indicators and data to assess them are from the *Livable Communities Indicators* report and reflect 2000 or 2001 data. For this evaluation, SPO has updated to 2002 data where they are available.

- The percent of people with outdoor recreational opportunities within walking/biking distance (59% in 2002)
- The percent of public water systems experiencing bacterial contamination (8.1%)
- The percent of Maine citizens saying it is important to them that the town they moved to have cultural and entertainment opportunities (68% in 2002)
- The average posted speed on arterial roads (45.53 mph)
- Number of passenger travel trips using alternative modes (increased by 4%)
- Percent of lakes suitable for swimming (96.2%)
- Number of public and private wells with petroleum contamination (35 down from 54 ten years ago)
- Percent of miles of rivers that support designated uses (96.4% in 2002)[17]
- Number of acres of flats closed to shellfish harvesting (157,000 down from 270,000 in 1993)
- Acres of land conserved (nearly 2 million)
- Acres of forest land certified as managed sustainably (4-fold increase)

Areas where improvements are needed[18]

- The percent of population in service center communities (44%)
- The number of new homes constructed in service center communities (25%)
- The percent of people able to walk to services or shops in their communities (27%)
- Stability of total taxable sales in primary service centers (fluctuated widely)
- Percent of freight shipped by alternative modes (10%)
- Number of berths and moorings (1,650)
- Acres of farmland (1.2 million down from 4.8 million in the 1950s)
- Loss of timberland due to development (13% decline since 1989)

The indicators of livable communities help us to assess the areas that need attention. Overall, Maine is making progress in community planning, water quality, access management, and land conservation. We have more work in strengthening service centers and downtowns, and protecting coastal resources, farms and timberlands.

Outputs

In addition to outcomes and indicators, we can assess the outputs of SPO and our partners. When taken together and sustained over time, these outputs will help the State make incremental progress towards the goals of the Act. Some of the outputs tracked for the period of this evaluation (1999-2002) are:

[17] Department of Environmental Protection, miles of rivers/streams supporting fishing and swimming.
[18] Indicators and data to assess them are from the *Livable Communities Indicators* report and reflect 2000 or 2001 data. For this evaluation, SPO has updated to 2002 data where they are available.

Grants: SPO awarded grants and funding totaling just over $2 million including:

- 43 Comprehensive Planning Grants ($602,077)
- 25 Implementation Grants ($228,447)
- 30 Comprehensive Plan Update Grants ($277,540)
- 11 Smart Growth Challenge Grants ($332,666)[19]
- 4 Great American Neighborhood Partnership Grants ($12,000)
- 3 Smart Growth Technical Assistance Grant ($95,492)
- 6 Rural Investment Pilot Grants ($84,255)[20]
- 3 Brownfield Assessment Grants ($120,000)[21]
- Funding for 11 regional councils ($325,000 annually)[22]

Comprehensive Plans: SPO conducted 72 reviews of comprehensive plans and zoning ordinances. Nine state departments actively participate in reviewing comprehensive plans.

Preferences and Targets: Seven state agencies modified 20 programs to incorporate Smart Growth preferences that resulted in, among others:

- 4 school districts choosing renovation over new construction
- 14 school districts siting new schools in residential growth areas
- 3 new state offices and two district courts locating in service center downtowns or growth areas

Technical Assistance Materials:

- *Making Schools Important to Neighborhoods Again* and *ABCs of School Site Selection*
- *Visioning Manual* to help a community conduct a successful visioning process
- *Smart Growth Toolbox* (sets of the best technical assistance materials available)
- Municipal technical assistance bulletins on a variety of development review topics
- Regional, web-based mapping service and computer generated build-out scenarios
- *Impact Fee Handbook*
- *Comprehensive Plan Update Manual*
- Electronic packages of state data to assist towns with comprehensive planning

Technical Assistance Workshops: SPO staff conducted more than 200 smart growth presentations and growth management meetings with community and civic groups, and private and professional organizations. In addition, a variety of workshops were conducted:

- (9) Community Visioning sessions
- Smart Growth Institute
- Great American Neighborhood charette
- Making Schools Important to Neighborhoods Again charette
- CEO training on smart growth
- Building Caps workshop

Management Systems: SPO staff created two databases to improve program management and enhance access to information:

- Municipal database that tracks nearly every aspect of the Program
- Searchable library database of over 4000 plans, ordinances, documents, and books

[19] This includes $40,000 in federal coastal funds
[20] This includes $42,663 in federal coastal funds
[21] These grants are federally funded.
[22] This includes $131,000 of federal coastal funds.

Measurement Issues and Data Limitations

Establishing the criteria and tracking systems to monitor them has not been easy. It has required considerable investment of resources. But ultimately it will tell us whether our policies and programs are having their intended effect – *is growth being managed in a way that meets the Legislature's goals*?

All three of the outcome measures meet the requirements of the law. They are quantifiable. They can be tracked over time. They will allow the Office to compare towns that have participated in the Program versus those that have not. But each has limitations.

Data Limitations for Outcome Measures

- Census data are collected decennially with annual estimates. These estimates are just that – *estimates*. They are almost always retrospectively corrected when the next decennial census data are collected. This is problematic for tracking shifts in population as we have to wait 10 years to know for sure what the growth rates are.
- The system envisioned for tracking where capital investment occurs is limited to state dollars and does not include federal funds (unless they pass through the State), nor does it record local funds, which are not inconsiderable.
- Tracking where growth occurs and where state capital investments go does not tell us whether there have been changes in the patterns of development. In the future, SPO will need to develop further evaluative techniques to determine if sprawling patterns of development are reversing.
- None of the measures help us evaluate cause and effect. They help us understand if change is occurring, but they do tell us why and whether it is due to any one particular growth management strategy or due to land use planning decisions at all.

Data Limitations for Indicators

The indicators of livable communities are valuable because of the collaborative process used to establish them. Selecting what to measure is as important as the actual measurement.[23] The interagency Smart Growth Coordinating Committee, consisting of representatives from over 15 state agencies, selected the indicators and provides the data to monitor them.

- In several cases in the report, survey data were collected in lieu of existing data sets, which simply were not available. In other cases, a proxy was developed with the recommendation that in the future a more targeted indicator be utilized.[24]
- The report card is only valuable if it is maintained. It will require effort on the part of the agencies participating in the Smart Growth Coordinating Committee to collect data.

[23] *Indicators of Livable Communities*, p. iii.
[24] Ibid.

Conclusions

Are we making progress?

In 1999, the Office concluded that the State's traditional approach to land use planning, which relied exclusively on local planning, and a town-by-town approach at that, was not enough. As a result, it shifted resources to foster state and regional initiatives that would have far greater impact than local efforts alone. While it is too early to tell yet whether the program changes made over the past four years have improved land use patterns, there are promising signs:

- School children in 18 towns will have new schools in or nearby a neighborhood rather than miles from where they live.
- State workers located in three new office buildings and two district courts will contribute to the economies of the downtown areas where they are located.
- Service centers and locally-designated growth areas are now preferred locations for a score of state programs that provide funding, grants, and loans to communities.
- Strip development is diminishing through transportation access management rules that establish standards for entrances onto state arterials.
- Maine's service center communities are finding some relief for services like roads, emergency, and hospital services that they provide to visitors from surrounding towns from municipal revenue sharing funds distributed by the state under a new formula.
- Towns and cities in a number of different regions in the state are looking for ways to consolidate services as a way of reducing costs and gaining efficiencies.
- The local economies of five towns will be enhanced by their designation as Main Street Maine towns.
- Productive farmlands are being protected through targeted Land for Maine's Future program funds.
- Maine farmers have access to improved business planning and marketing assistance through the *Farms for the Future* and *Get Real Get Maine* campaigns.
- Towns and regional organizations are beginning to cooperatively develop open space and wildlife protection programs based on the Beginning with Habitat model.
- Maine now has a statewide Geo-Library that will make geographic information system mapping technology available to everyone who has access to the World Wide Web which will enhance the State's ability to track the location of state investments and the location of new development.
- Nearly 1500 residents in a number of Maine communities will have access to homes on smaller lots in traditional, walkable, mixed-use neighborhoods.